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Boutros-Ghali's Power Grab

Once again U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has sought to assume unprecedented powers and functions that the United Nations Charter vests in the Security Council. During the last year, the secretary general, who is from Egypt, has repeatedly told the Security Council what it should and should not do with regard to Bosnia and Somalia. Now he has turned his attention to Israel. Once again his initiatives are not necessarily useful, and his interpretation of his powers raises questions that go far beyond the issue at hand to a more basic one: Who is in charge at the United Nations—the member states or the Secretariat?

Last July Boutros-Ghali rejected a cease-fire resolution that had been negotiated by European Community representative Lord Peter Carrington and passed by the Security Council. Boutros-Ghali challenged the right of a regional organization, in this case the EC, to act without consulting him first. He challenged the right of the Security Council to act on a resolution on which he had not been consulted. He declined to implement the resolution passed by the Security Council, saying the United Nations lacked the necessary resources.

Neither the EC nor the Security Council challenged his unprecedented assertion of authority. Instead, Carrington resigned and the

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EC's new representative, David Owen, has since worked in tandem with the secretary general's personal representative, Cyrus Vance—to no very useful end.

Though Boutros-Ghali is regularly described as an activist secretary general, he has resisted any action but limited peacekeeping in Bosnia in what he originally termed—but now denies calling—a "rich man's war." Each time the Security Council has approached a decision to enforce one of its resolutions to protect Bosnians—the no-fly zone or delivering humanitarian assistance—Boutros-Ghali has appealed for more time to find a political solution. The result has been continued bombing, murdering, starving, raping, freezing of civilians in Bosnia—and endless negotiation.

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on Somalia and his views about the resolution mandating action—even though the result was a resolution so prolix and ambiguous that no one is certain what it means.

The Security Council accepted his request for a major U.N. operation in Mozambique, even though the situation has substantially improved.

Encountering no obstacles, the secretary general has continued his efforts to redefine the Security Council's duties and its priorities. Now he has called on the council to take action against Israel: more precisely to "take whatever measures are required to ensure" that Israel "respects" Resolution 799, which calls for repatriation of 400 Palestinian activists exiled for their ties to the violent fundamentalist Hamas campaign that has cost dozens of lives on the West Bank, Gaza and inside Israel.

Israel's non-compliance with Resolution 799, said Boutros-Ghali, "challenges the authority of the Security Council" and feeds the impression that the council "does not attach equal importance to the implementation of all of its decisions." Therefore, the secretary general considered it his "duty" to recommend to the Security Council that it "take whatever measures are required" to ensure that its previous resolution "is respected."

This was a clear call to the Security Council to impose sanctions on the Jewish state—and it was understood as such. Israel was outraged, especially by the implication that failure to enforce Israeli compliance with Resolution 799 would undermine the legitimacy of enforcing Iraq's compliance with the 1991 armistice and the suggestion that Israel's expelling of 400 activists was morally equivalent to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait.

Israel's officials were further disturbed because Boutros-Ghali took no account of the deportees' association with Hamas.

This extremist organization has a covenant that asserts "every Jew is a settler, and it is our obligation to kill him." Hamas is implacably hostile to peace and the peace process.

"They are completely ignoring extremist Islamic terrorism," said Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. "If the United Nations wants to control Israel," said Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, "it must answer how it is going to control Hamas and the dangers facing Israel."

The U.S. government also did not welcome the secretary general's call for a confrontation in the United Nations over Israel. During the presidential campaign, the Clinton-Gore team promised to use the U.S. veto—if necessary—to protect Israel against U.N. sanctions. A quickly circulated letter signed by almost 20 U.S. senators reminded Secretary of State Warren Christopher that he had made the same commitment. Obviously, however, the new administration would prefer not to begin in the United Nations with a confrontation.

If there must be a confrontation, however, the administration and the Security Council would do well not to confront one another or Israel—but instead the tendencies to "imperial overreach" of the U.N.'s chief administrative officer.

...tive power in the Security Council, so far the governments of member states have passively accepted Boutros-Ghali's reinterpretation of his role and theirs. The member states have adopted the secretary general's priorities and programs as if he were the chief executive in a presidential system and the Security Council were a rubber-stamp legislature.

The Security Council accepted his initiatives